

**Appropriations Committee
Deficiency Hearing**

November 18, 2009

**Testimony of
Brian K. Murphy, Acting Commissioner
Department of Correction**

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Brian Murphy. I am the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Correction. Joining me today is Acting Deputy Commissioner Carol Salsbury.

As I begin, I would like to inform you that the Department continues to operate in safe, secure and orderly manner with an incarcerated population that is some 1,400 offenders below our all time high, which was experienced in February of 2008.

I come before you today to address the projected budget deficit for the Department of Correction. We face a challenge this fiscal year to reduce our annual expenditures by about \$21.5 million dollars, in an attempt to meet the reduced appropriation that the agency has received.

I am deeply aware that my Department is among many being called upon to meet this challenge. I have made clear to my staff that we must do more with less. We will continue to strive to achieve any efficiencies that are possible without jeopardizing safety and security.

However, even with these efforts, which I will detail further, I must inform you that meeting our budget will be a challenge this year.

First though, I would like to share with you some good news. New levels of cooperation and improved communications that have taken place throughout the criminal justice system over the last two years are working and paying dividends.

Improvements in information sharing have contributed to effective population management while enhancing public safety in our communities. We are meeting regularly with other stakeholders including the Judicial Branch, Chief State's Attorney, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Board of Pardons and Paroles to collaborate on methods to further streamline our systems.

I am also proud to acknowledge the professional staff of the Department of Correction. It is through their diligence that we continue to provide safe, secure and efficient custody of the inmate population, as well as effective supervision of a growing number of offenders in the community.

Through the efforts of the Governor and this Legislature, we have restored and enhanced a reentry furlough process that further improves the reentry of offenders back into the community, and aids us in managing our inmate population levels, while supporting public safety.

In the last year we have been able to increase by more than 500, the number of inmates that are supervised in the community at a substantially lower cost.

As the population has decreased, we have been able to close housing units and reallocate staff to reduce overtime costs. As you may know, we are now evaluating the feasibility of closing an entire facility for even greater savings.

In regards to overtime, we have been able to reduce our overtime usage by more than 94,000 hours as compared to the same period last year. This has occurred even with the retirements of more than 400 of our most senior, experienced staff.

Working with the Office of Policy and Management, we have received stimulus funding to further expand video conferencing. This allows inmates to participate in hearings and other proceedings without leaving a secure facility. This technology reduces staffing and transportation costs and improves public safety. Federal funds are now also supporting improved DNA testing, infectious disease control and improvements in our parole caseload management system.

Despite our concerted efforts, there are two areas in which we are forced to project cost overruns this year.

In Other Expenses we anticipate a shortfall of \$17 million, and in Worker's Compensation our estimate is \$4.5-million. In both areas we continue to aggressively contain costs.

We have extensively pursued energy conservation in the areas of lighting efficiency, water conservation, HVAC and ventilation upgrades.

In food services we continue to provide a nutritious and economical menu, through opportunity buys and prompt payment discounts.

Discretionary spending in all areas has been halted. In the first four months of this year our OE expenditures were \$7.4 million lower than the same period last year. We continue to do all we can to reduce those expenditures as our OE budget is 24 percent less than what was expended last year.

In Worker's Compensation our funding target this year is about \$1.7 million less than our expenses last fiscal year.

We have recently enhanced our efforts to further reduce our Workers Compensation expenditure. While utilization of recuperative posts is a long standing part of our strategy, we have collaborated with the AFSCME NP-4 bargaining unit and DAS to create our Light Duty positions at each facility, for staff who are not 100 percent physically able to perform normal duties, to return to work sooner. This is just the latest in our efforts to avoid lost days due to injury and enable injured staff to return to work safely and promptly.

Please be assured that my staff and I will maintain our commitment to finding efficiencies and cost reductions while insuring the safety of the public, our staff and the inmate population.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today, and I would be happy to answer your questions.